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ORIGINAL COMMUNICATIONS

WITH THE MAINE TO SOUTH AFRICA *

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THE American hospital ship Maine left London, England, bound for Cape Town, South Africa, Saturday, December 23, 1899, sailing under three flags, a most unusual occurrence and marking an historical event. The flags flying were the Red Cross, the Union Jack with Red Cross inserted in the centre, and the Stars-and-Stripes. "He who runs may read" of our errand of mercy. Thus decorated, we slowly, almost imperceptibly, drifted from the West India Dock, where preparations for the voyage had been made. Those of our friends and of the cause sufficiently interested to brave the weather—and they were many—bade us farewell, God-speed, and safe return. The crews of the different vessels lying in dock cheered as we passed, cheered Lady Randolph Churchill, who accompanied us in her official capacity as chairman of the Committee of the American Hospital Ship Fund, cheered Winston Churchill, who had until a short time previously from early in November been a prisoner of war at Pretoria, and of whose plucky escape and safe arrival at Delagoa Bay we had just heard, cheered the captain (Captain Stone), officers, medical officers, and then lustily sang out instructions the tenor of which was to "bring back Kruger."

Slowly yet surely a thick blanket of fog settled down upon us, and ere we left the dock it was ordered that we should remain there for the night. Early the next morning we slowly proceeded, being detained

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again by fog, and it was not until Monday morning, Christmas Day, that the pilot left us near Dover.

Christmas Day on board a hospital ship just starting on a four-weeks' voyage is a new and interesting experience. The day passed quietly and without event until, after indulging in a regular Christmas dinner, the roughness of the sea made itself felt in an uncomfortable manner. From that night, December 25, until Friday, December 29, we would like to draw a veil, being during that time ungraciously, unmercifully, and unkindly treated by the far-famed "Bay of Biscay O." The decks in the mean time were almost deserted, the weather continued unusually stormy, and it was not until we sighted the Canary Islands, January 2, 1900, that our equilibrium was restored. The sight of land, houses, and lights—for it was evening—was a most refreshing sight, and our spirits rose, after a tedious and depressing period of ten days.

LAS PALMAS, Wednesday, January 3.—Having arrived too late to anchor, the ship slowly cruised backward and forward all night, the coast being in this vicinity dangerous on account of the rocks. It is here the Dudgeon Grange went ashore, a transport on its way to South Africa with horses, etc., and which lies now on the rocks a total wreck. Early this morning, however, we anchored, and signals were hoisted. The news we received was very meagre, and I believe not reliable, regarding the war.

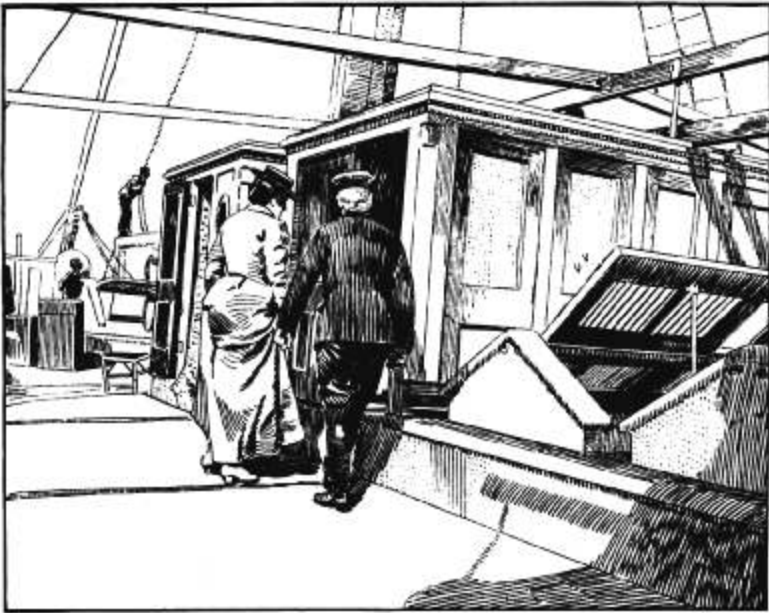
Las Palmas is the capital of the Canary Islands, belonging to Spain. This island, like most of the southern or tropical ones, is picturesque. The town is built at the base of the hills that rise almost from the water's edge; the hills, ending in regular and irregular peaks, are usually clothed in mist, and to-day are tipped with glints of sunshine. The houses dotted along the shore are one-story buildings, with here and there a more pretentious-looking domicile or hotel, and the square towers of a church break the line, otherwise monotonous. The coloring one is accustomed to see in views of Venice particularly is here found to perfection; the various shades on land, sea, and sky blend in one peculiar light, leaving the impression of all being enveloped in a haze of intense *clear* blue, and everywhere pervading. I am indebted to our captain for a peep at Teneriffe, the snow-crowned peak, which I saw in the distance, but most distinctly, through the ship's glasses.

It is here—and I must not forget to note it—that we found the most delicious oranges, but they are extremely perishable. We bought sufficient to last us for several weeks, and many have been sent on board by friends.

At eight P.M. we started on the last and longer part of our voyage,

and left Las Palmas much benefited physically and morally by our stop, even of so short duration. The evening is beautiful and the motion of the ship not uncomfortable.

January 4.—Is the first fine day we have spent since leaving London. All have settled down to a systematic life and accept the monotony that invariably prevails on board ship. Breakfast, luncheon, and dinner are regularly partaken of, odd hours and minutes are filled with work or pleasure; for distractions we are ourselves each to the other responsible. Evenings can be comfortably spent on deck. The moon and stars, though



LORD ROBERTS VISITING HOSPITAL SHIP MAINE AT CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA

they bring us no messages, recall to our memory incidents that have seemed lost in the busier moments of our lives, and I even think of Browning. The sky, the sea, over, around, and below us, form the confines from which we apparently cannot escape and live.

There is, fortunately, work to be done—a great deal in connection with the wards; in the line of cleaning, unpacking, and sorting of stores; unpacking and listing of books, etc. These duties will occupy most of our time, or until Cape Town is sighted.

Tuesday, January 9, 1900.—To-day “the ship is dressed” in her

best (this term is used when flags are flying) in honor of the anniversary of Lady Randolph Churchill's birthday. To-day, also, the ceremonies of crossing the line (equator) were conducted by Father Neptune and his unfortunate spouse, who, we observed with much sympathy from our place of safety, the bridge (by the courtesy of the captain we were invited to watch the proceedings from an elevation), was merely a figure-head. We thoroughly enjoyed the fun, which was tolerated for the sake of sport and custom by the unfortunate men crossing the line for the first time. The officers, surgeons, and others unwilling to undergo the shaving and ducking process were allowed to pay a fine of two shillings sixpence levied by the judge after a *proper* hearing of the case.

Wednesday, January 17.—A grand smoking concert was held this evening on the poop-deck, all talent on board participating. A large and appreciative audience was present.

While making preparations for the sick and wounded, the intense longing for news comes over me. I miss the daily touch with the world, and the complete isolation for the time being robs one of the possibility of securing for himself the joys that sea-air, sunshine, and complete rest would otherwise bring. I wonder, and I lapse into the old refrain, What news will we hear at Cape Town? and, further, I speculate as to when the war will be over. Ignorance may be bliss, but it is right hard to be content and ignorant.

Saturday, January 20, 1900.—The voyage begun four weeks ago to-day is drawing to a close, and we expect to reach Cape Town to-morrow. The hospital wards are in trim order and the appearance of the ship is much improved. On inspection we fully realize that much hard work has been done since we left Las Palmas. The paint-brush has been busily plied by the crew above and the orderlies below deck, much to the discomfort of the wearer of skirts, it being impossible to maintain a chalk-line carriage on account of the rolling propensity of the ship.

Every one seems happy and cheerful, expecting to see land to-morrow. A message signalled from a passing vessel conveyed the news, "Reported relief of Ladysmith." This was received with great delight, and the first word of the message was intentionally omitted or not in our minds, as it suited the disposition of the individual, and we longed to hear the truth.

Sunday, January 21, 1900.—Early this morning we caught sight of land—a dark line at first; then, outlined against the sky, the rocks which form the coast. About seven A.M. we caught the first view of Table Mountain, then the signal-station standing on a bluff, as a sentinel on guard. It only seems consistent in our present state of mind, due to constantly dwelling on the absorbing topics of war, to imagine the



"IN YOU GO." THE BASKET TRICK

coast bristling with cannon, rifles, bayonets, lances, etc., the various implements of war. But the illusion was quickly dispelled on approaching nearer, and in full view, Table Mountain, with Cape Town nestling at its base, facing the laughing waters of Table Bay, was most reassuring. This sense of protection and strength was increased on beholding the number of ships lying at anchor—transports of every size and description, too many to enumerate, with other vessels and sailing-ships of all nationalities. We feel proud to be numbered among the many that have come to give assistance and are privileged to be present at this interesting place at this momentous time. History no doubt will hand down as famous the names of many of the people we have met and of many of those we are likely to meet here,—this Mecca of the British soldier of the latter months of 1899 and the early part of 1900.

After due and proper formalities had been indulged in, such as visits from transport officers, port-master, and a personal visit from the United States consul, Colonel Stowe, permission to go ashore was granted. News we have received but little of, and, to-day being Sunday, letters none. The weather is beautiful, corresponding with our month of June. The following days are fully occupied in visiting the town and in receiving visitors. Among those who thus complimented us on our work must be mentioned Lord Roberts, Sir Alfred Milner, Governor of Cape Colony, Sir Edward Chichester, of special interest to Americans, Major Morgan, commanding officer of the hospital ship *Princess of Wales*, the principal officers of the medical department, also many Americans resident in South Africa, refugees now at Cape Town.

Tuesday, January 23, 1900.—An “At Home” was given “to meet Lady Randolph Churchill and the Staff of the American hospital ship *Maine*,” at Mount Nelson Hotel, perched on a beautiful spot on the mountain’s side and considered the best hotel in South Africa, now the abiding-place of many so-called refugees. Here we were most hospitably entertained, and assured of the interest and sympathy of a large colony of Americans. Captain Slocum, U.S.A., attaché, was present among other visitors.

The peculiar phenomenon of the Table Cloth on Table Mountain was watched with great interest, as at this spot it can be seen to perfection. The cause of this effect is the low-hung cloud or mist, which rests first on the top of the Table and, falling over the edge, looks like the spray that tumbles over Niagara Falls until it meets the warmer air, when it entirely disappears. We saw this under the inspiration of the sunset, which in itself was glorious.

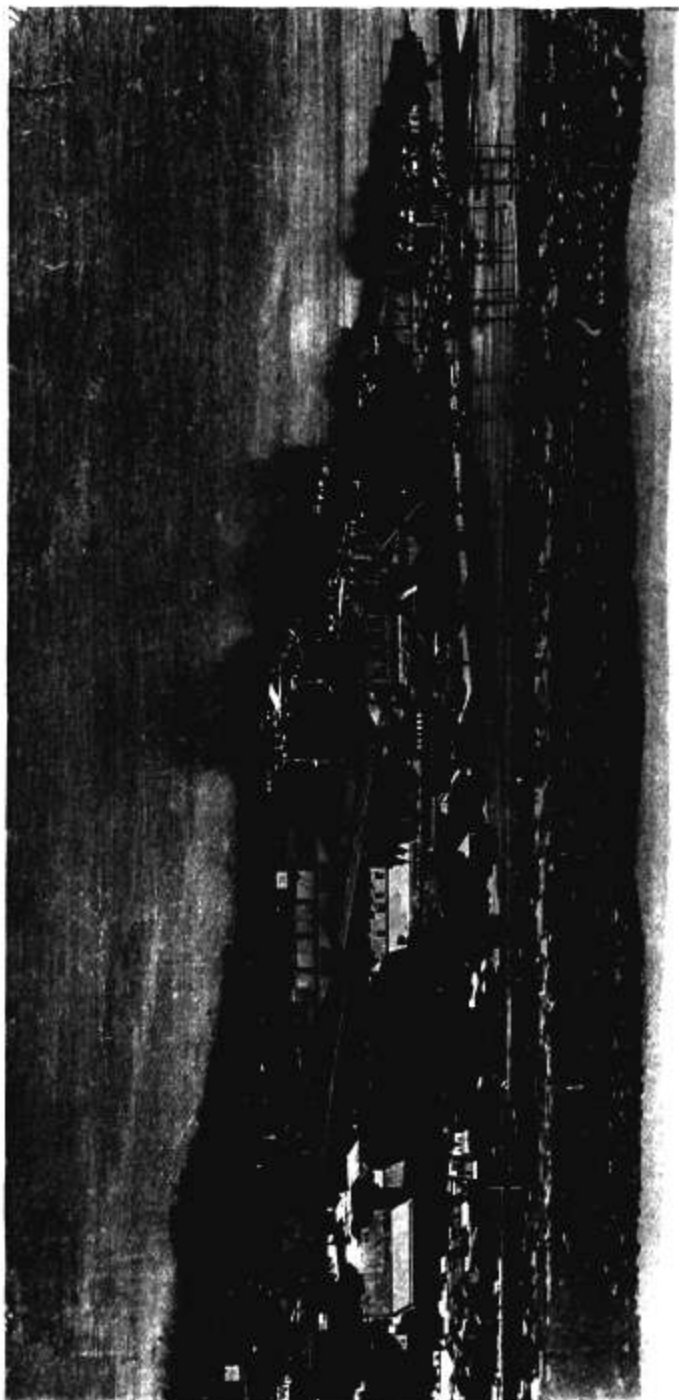
Thursday, January 25, 1900.—Found us under orders to proceed to Durban and await the relief of Ladysmith. Very little news has been

received during our stay here, though it is universally known that General Buller has again begun operations for the relief of Ladysmith. No news cannot always be interpreted as being good news, so silence seems momentous at this particular time.

Accompanying us to Durban are eight sisters of the Army Nursing Reserve, who came out attached to Hospital No. 5, but who were disbanded before the formation was completed, as their services were needed elsewhere. Much speculation was indulged in as to where they would be stationed, the more daring hoping for an entrance to the "besieged city," as help of this kind was badly needed. The East Coast of Africa has the reputation of being very rough, and the trick of landing passengers from the larger to the smaller boats in baskets is here practised. We are greatly pleased to hear that the journey will only take about four days, and that the coast will be in sight nearly all the way.

What a delightful trip, if one could only forget for a brief period the reason of our being in these waters, and think only of the place, the climate, and our surroundings, which have a home-like appearance from constant contact and habitual use.

Sunday, January 28, 1900.—Is a day of grace and leisure. The air is beautiful. Though the haze on shore and on the ridges of the hills denotes heat, we suffered but very little, being protected by the awnings. About three P.M. the horizon showed signs of a storm, which steadily increased. The barometer fell rapidly, and we felt it had become a serious question, when orders were given to furl all awnings, close ports, and send all portable chairs, etc., below. Fortunately, the awning covering the stern of the ship was left up, as it was considered quite secure, and for some time we sat under it, watching the approaching storm, the clouds, and the peculiar appearance of the water. There was a heavy stillness in the air, portentous of coming events, and nothing would have induced us to go below. None of us were aware of what was transpiring but a short distance off. The rain, which began with slight force and in uncertain quantities, now fell heavily, the lightning and thunder were continuous, and the wind so increased in volume that we were obliged to move to the port side of the ship for shelter. Hardly had we seated ourselves when large hailstones fell in profusion. They were from half an inch to an inch in diameter and even larger before they fell on the deck and broke. In a few minutes the sea assumed the peculiar appearance of being covered by myriads of miniature fountains apparently from six inches to a foot and a half in height, caused by the force with which the hailstones were precipitated into the water. These, resting on the surface, gave to the sea the appearance of a floating snow-



PANORAMA OF DURBAN AND BEREA FROM THE BLUFF. NO. 1



PANORAMA OF DURBAN AND BEREA FROM THE BLUFF. NO. 2

bank. Busily watching this interesting scene, and with our backs to the approaching storm-cloud, we were taken unawares when "the terrific squall with hurricane force" broke over our heads. We were obliged to crouch on the deck, covering ourselves as best we could, until rescued and taken to the companion-way. Hardly had we reached the deck below when the awning which had been our protection to a great extent was torn from its fastenings, the braces both of iron and wood were wrenched from their sockets, and with the canvas were hurled over the port side of the ship. The rain and hail with the wind continued in force for some minutes, then subsided, and the sun, breaking through the clouds, appeared as if smiling at our fears. During the storm the ship had put out to sea, and we lost sight of the coast-line. The wind and rain, which continued at intervals during the night, gradually lessened in force, and the morning broke hot and oppressive.

Monday, January 29, 1900.—We reached Durban about three P.M. Passing the bluff on which stands the signal-station, we entered what is called the outer anchorage. Here we saw, among many other ships, but prominent among them all, H.M.S. *Terrible*. This cruiser with her sister ship, the *Powerful*, are two of the largest afloat. The crews of these two ships have made themselves conspicuous by their conduct in seeking to relieve besieged Ladysmith.

Here we heard of the retreat of Sir Redvers Buller's "unbeaten forces" after the third attempt made to relieve the unfortunate city. The number of casualties is given at about sixteen hundred. Immediately preparations were begun on board the *Maine* to perfect the accommodations for the reception of the sick and wounded soldiers. Under the supervision of Captain Holland (one of the officers of the transport department) changes were made that were absolutely necessary to secure greater comfort for the patients and improved facilities for the nursing department, and for the first time our hospital assumed its proper appearance.

As the British government found it required a larger number of hospital ships, many passenger vessels were here transformed for this purpose. This had been most expeditiously done at Durban harbor, and we found ourselves in the hands of experts. Among the hospital ships which we saw during our stay at Durban were the *Spartan*, *Trojan*, *Avoca*, *Nubia*, *Lismore Castle*, and *Oceana*, and others were under way ere we left.

(To be continued.)